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Seventh meeting of the Africa Regional
Co-ordinating Committee on the Integration
of Women in Development

Yaounde, Republic of Cameroon
2-5 April 1986

LC/NAIROBI

EXTENT TO WHICH NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS
TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THE CONTRIBUTION OF WOMEN

Introduction

1. Africa is a group of countries forming the stage whereon are acted out major contradictions in which all socio-economic concepts take on the form of an obstacle course which confounds anyone wishing to draw up a typology of problems that must be solved before being able, finally, to discuss development. Be that as it may, the most appropriate approach will be the one which, through an essentially scientific analysis, best takes into account the multiplicity of phenomena in the modern geopolitical arena, characterized as it is by well-known political and religious ideologies. It is apparent, therefore, that the definition of clear national strategies for development is a function of the sovereignty of governments, and hence makes the charting of new courses for self-centred and self-sustained development strategies based on each country's "own forces" a delicate undertaking. Moreover, the continuing situation of growing impoverishment gives grounds for wondering about the size and true compass of each African country's "own forces", and about the disparity between the intentions spelt out in development strategies and plans and the results of activities undertaken with a view to development.
2. Women in Africa constitute about 50.31 percent of the total population and 22.37 percent of the economically active population, while 42.5 percent of economically active women are to be found in the agriculture sector. During the United Nations Development Decade the United Nations and particularly the African Training and Research Centre for Women (ATRCW), recognizing that the effort to involve women in development activities necessarily (in the light of the socio-economic and political conditions Africa has to contend with) entails the definition of clear development strategies which take into account the contribution of women to socio-economic life, the establishment of structures and mechanisms for promoting and following up this contribution of women, and, finally, the release and mobilization of financial resources and the training of the human resources required. ATRCW, then, made considerable efforts to assist member States in establishing or strengthening national mechanisms for women, and in designing projects and programmes whose medium-term objective was to increase the contribution of women to national development efforts. Much indeed still remains to be done, but the essential thing was to make a start, and that is the note of hope for tomorrow!
3. If, after 10 years of activities by governments and the United Nations for the advancement of women in the world and in Africa, African national plans take but little account of women's contribution to development, this is first of all, among other reasons, because the sectors in which substantial numbers of women are active, namely, food-crop agriculture and the marginalized jobs sector (small-scale retail trade, services and crafts), have not hitherto been recognized as areas of any importance either for the planning exercise or, it goes without saying, for the results of that planning.
4. Thus, out of 51 independent States, barely 10 openly pay attention in their national development plans to women and their contribution to development. The unfortunately still prevailing invisibility of women in national development plans is the result of numerous obstacles which may be grouped for convenience of analysis into two types:

- I. Psycho-sociological obstacles;
- II. Structural and organizational obstacles.

I. Psycho-sociological obstacles

5. These are many and varied, and are just as important as the obstacles that can be identified in other areas. In African countries as a whole indeed, the decision-makers and actors in development planning are men who give no clear encouragement to the reasoned consideration of women's contribution to development activities. When planners are asked about the contribution of women, the kind of answer that can generally be expected is "why specific measures for women? Development is for the national community as a whole", or "women are already integrated in development". Be that as it may, most of the replies received testify to a "misperception" of women and their role in development, which it has still not been possible to bring about even after 30 years of trying. There is a failure to put human resources, especially women, in touch with the problems which hamper development, for example the "economic crisis", the deterioration in terms of trade, and so on, as if the monetary problems to which these give rise did not have to do, in terms of their causes and their effects, with men and women performing specific functions within the existing economic structures. Disasters, which as is known are not due solely to the vagaries of the weather, but are something to which men and women contribute have a share in, as regards both the underlying causes and the solutions to be brought to bear, are too rarely considered from the standpoint of women's contribution.

6. Set against this, there are women and the perception they have, or can have, of the role they should be called upon to play in development. In addition to the place commonly assigned to women in line with their image in tradition and religion, consideration should be given to the political functions assigned to them in mobilizing the population behind the national party's policy objectives, functions which may explain the discrepancies between the objectives proclaimed and the effects actually produced. It must be admitted that women are more concerned about the image men may have of them and their actions in the context of the activities undertaken. The fact, moreover, that women have still not succeeded in crystallizing the perception they have of their own contribution in terms of a programme or quantifiable data does little, it must be said, to advance their cause in the eyes of national planning institutions.

7. National planning decision-makers also cite the lack of solidarity among women. These are ideas that apply with equal force to the male community, which is more inclined to emphasize how members of the human race should, after all, think and behave. It happens that the women who for the time being are in a position to act within the existing structures are vulnerable to this type of argument, because of their still limited numbers in socio-economic decision-making circles, and that they are easy to manipulate for the same reasons.

8. Moreover, even though African women leaders have made and are making great efforts to achieve visibility in the development field, the political dimension of their effort outweighs the highly technical dimension required for development purposes. There has to be additional input of effort and of vigilance on the

part of national mechanisms and their officials to keep within appropriate optimum limits with a view to promoting the contribution of women to the accumulation and consolidation of the wealth of nations.

II. Structural and organizational obstacles

9. These may manifest themselves in the difficulty of choosing national development policies, as well as in the mobilization and action mechanisms envisaged by African countries. Over the decade 1975-1985, countries established national mechanisms for the advancement of women. These mechanisms differ in scope from country to country, but also in their action within one and the same country. In many cases, indeed, these mechanisms are not having the success they should in establishing organic links with national development planning services. However, some few examples may be noted which merit close study, in terms both of their structure and of the programmes and projects they have implemented. In general, projects aimed at women related to so-called traditional women's activities - dressmaking, pottery, basket making: if agricultural production projects are started up, they are very often taken over by men as soon as they become productive, because the women come up against problems of management and administration. Moreover, projects for women are very often social welfare projects (family health, socio-cultural activities), and thus not openly and directly oriented towards measurable social production.

10. Thus, on the basis of such data, should not national mechanisms set as their priority task the monitoring of the socio-economic and political system, at the design, implementation and resource allocation phases, so as to ensure the visibility of women as well as men at all stages of development activities? Looking at the food-crop agriculture sector, which occupies an important place in African economies that is being increasingly recognized, and also includes the largest number of women, it is apparent that the obstacles have been essentially the absence of a national policy in the proper sense, the absence of clear and effective roles for women, the difficulty women face in obtaining access to financial and technological resources, and the absence of organized markets for the forms of production in which women are involved.

11. Apart from the established fact that access to the monetary economy is easier for men through cash crops, women have to face the well-known obstacles of access to land, credit and modern means of production, and difficulty of access to the knowledge and know-how dispensed in the areas of agriculture-related training and education. The invisibility which characterizes women's participation in agricultural production naturally extends also to their contribution to stockraising and the processing of livestock products, particularly milk; this is reflected in women's inability to join dairy co-operatives where they exist, and their inability likewise to seek assistance, or to aspire to undergo training and acquire specialized skills.

III. Towards solutions for tomorrow

12. In order to make it possible to measure the participation of women in national development plans, national development strategies need first of all to define clearly the status of women and the roles that can be assigned to them. This comes down, in a sense, to defining:

- clearly structured production systems;
- appropriate consumption patterns consistent with established national priorities;
- a totally unprejudiced allocation of national resources to basic production sectors.

13. There is also a need to draw up and apply a deliberate policy of action aimed at involving women in national planning exercises.

14. Women's visibility in national development plans must be a priority for women themselves, especially for women in national mechanisms, for in the final analysis the struggle for the advancement of women, while it must count on the involvement of men, must be waged by women themselves.



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LC/NAIRD...

FINAL REPORT ON WOMEN
AND
THE INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT DECADE FOR AFRICA

1. Over the past two years, the ECA women's programme undertook a number of case studies on the situation of women with regard to the Industrial Development Decade in Africa (IDDA), with the aim of discovering how women could be more effectively integrated into the development process in the Region. 1/ The case studies were done in Egypt, Nigeria, the Republic of Cote d'Ivoire and the United Republic of Tanzania, in order to capture a diversity of industrialization experiences,
2. Thus, the examples that were studied included a north African country with cultural attitudes favouring the seclusion of women but also perhaps the longest history of industrialization in the Region and a male labour shortage in some critical areas as a result of labour migration; an Anglophone west African country, the most populous and heavily industrialized of the sub-Saharan member States; a Francophone west African country heavily penetrated by multinationals and with several of the industries promoted by the first phase of the Industrial Development Decade in Africa programme, such as textiles and agro-industries, which might have significant opportunities for women; and, finally, an Anglophone Lusaka MULPOC country, relatively little industrialized, but with a strong ideology in support of basic industrialization as well as promotion of the equitable participation of women in the public sector.
3. Despite the linguistic, cultural, geographic and economic diversity of the cases, the findings revealed remarkable similarities in the situation of women in industrialization. All had a very low number of women workers in the industrial sector, using various indicators to measure their participation. Figures ranged from one to 5 percent in the respective countries of women working in the industrial labour force. As a percent of the total industrial labour force, the figures were similarly low. With variations from country to country and by particular industries, women generally comprised less than 10 percent of the industrial labour force. Their participation as a percentage of the workforce was surprisingly low, especially in the Republic of Cote d'Ivoire, even in areas such as textiles which have historically and worldwide employed large numbers of women workers, illustrating that in situations of labour surplus and high unemployment, male workers predominate even in jobs traditionally held by women.

1/ A preliminary report on the results of these studies (E/ECA/RCIWD/OAU/6) was presented to the Regional Intergovernmental Preparatory Meeting for the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women (Arusha, 1984); the four case studies in full plus an introductory essay synthesizing the major issues will be published by ECA in the second quarter of 1986 under the title Women and the Industrial Development Decade in Africa.

4. When employed in industry, women tended to be in low status, poorly paid, unskilled work subject to technological displacement, that is, when the process in which they worked became more highly mechanized, they were replaced by male workers. By definition, highly mechanized industries were capital intensive. These were almost entirely male domains because of employer perceptions that women were unable to operate heavy machines and government labour legislation prohibiting their night shift work but also because these jobs were generally unionized and better paid. Women were little represented in unions and rarely as union officials. Women worked at repetitive tasks, which employers thought male workers would find too boring, or at tasks which employers perceived as being feminine specialities because of their association with domestic work, such as cleaning.

5. Few women were in supervisory positions and even fewer in managerial positions. There were no examples found of women in top managerial positions. With the exception of Egypt which had growing numbers of women engineers, women were rarely found in technical fields, which were marked by labour shortages. Few women were in these fields because their educational backgrounds were generally deficient, particularly in scientific subjects. Here the complex factors of socialization of girls, attitudes of parents, teachers and guidance counsellors were crucial, either keeping girls from school, inhibiting their successful performance in school or guiding them away from fields in which they were labour opportunities. In addition, some of the limitations came from girls themselves, not daring to enter as apprentices in demand technical specialities. Again, only in Egypt were women moving into non-traditional occupations; here the stimulus was shortage of male labour as a result of migration.

6. Another limiting factor in women's industrial employment was the general concentration of manufacturing enterprises in urban areas, when the majority of African women lived in rural areas. Although Government efforts to improve the situation of women through protective labour legislation and requirements for provisions of social services (in Egypt and Nigeria, employers were required to provide nurseries and pre-schools when women employees exceeded a certain number) as well as maternity and lactation leave laws were certainly well meaning, they generally worked against the employment of women, especially in the private sector as employers hesitated to hire women workers because they regarded them as more costly. The costs came both from the requisite social services as well as from their absences (maternity leave, taking sick children to clinics, etc.) which hindered production schedules and lowered productivity. Some research showed that women had fewer absences than men workers, but other research generally confirmed that women's multiple roles made it extremely difficult for them to be workers on fixed schedules, affected their performance and formed a functional basis for employers discriminating against them. Their multiple roles and attendant responsibilities not only constrained them at the factory worker level but at lower and middle managerial levels as well, though here the problems were more frequently in the perceptions of employers than in reality (beliefs that married women were not interested in a career, would not move in response to a better job offer, were unable to travel on business, etc.).

7. Thus, the general picture that emerged was a rather gloomy one, giving little hope for women in modern sector manufacturing industries. Their situation was closely tied to the prevalent patterns of industrialization in the region, still largely one of import substitution, primarily producing goods for the urban elite using largely imported materials, tending toward capital intensiveness and generating low levels of employment. Little evidence was discerned, despite government policies, of moving toward export orientation and almost none towards the goal of integrated self reliance advocated both in the Lagos Plan for the Economic Development of Africa as well as in the IDDA programme. As long as African countries continue with import substitution-oriented industrialization, there will be little future for women in industry. Generating few jobs, these industries will prefer to employ men who require fewer social services, are little constrained by multiple roles and who are supported by labour unions.

8. As fertility remains high in the Region and male attitudes towards domestic responsibilities unchanged, the multiple role conflicts of women show little sign of abating. The rare instances where the industrial employment of women is encouraged, where women are entering non-traditional occupations and technical fields, seems to be limited to areas of male labour migration, a situation found only in Egypt and those southern African countries where the majority of males migrate to work in South Africa. This situation is unlikely to be duplicated in other areas.

9. However, this sketch is not the entire picture. Women wanting to participate in the industrialization of the Region have several paths open to them. The easiest and most obvious, requiring little education and few skills, is to seek jobs for which employers feel that they have special abilities. To date, however, these have been in low-skilled and low-paid jobs such as labelling, bottle cleaning and light packaging. However, many of these jobs are rapidly being displaced by technological advances. Thus, any industrialization strategy which encourages women to specialize in a particular "female occupation" within the manufacturing sector may lead to female structural unemployment due to technological substitution.

10. The other obvious path, which is not subject to technological displacement, is to seek employment in scientific and technical occupations which are still in short supply or which will have unfilled vacancies and attractive salaries as the regions industrialization becomes more sophisticated and specialized. While such jobs would be highly attractive to women, it is obvious that there are few women presently qualified for them. For women to enter these fields, the path is long and arduous and they must be prepared for it nearly from birth. Young girls will have to compete with young boys in schools; they will have to study scientific and technical subjects; they will have to avoid the pitfalls of adolescent pregnancy, early marriage and high fertility. Parental and societal attitudes will have to offer constant support. National women's organizations, through their structures, will have to co-ordinate support for young girls as they seek to advance in scientific fields and move into new areas of employment. Government programmes and policies, designed with an input from women themselves, must

encourage young girls and women in this direction. While it is a long and difficult route, it will reap rewards that will multiply themselves. The next generation of young girls will find it easier to follow the same road once there are role models available for them. It will certainly maximize the utilization of available human resources in the Region. Regrettably, because of the difficulty of the path, it is not one that can be followed by many women.

11. The area that holds the greatest promise for the employment of significant numbers of women in the industrialization of the Region is the development of small-scale enterprises, particularly in the agro-industrial sector. Firstly, this area is in line with the goals of African member States moving to self-reliance, as it serves the needs of the mass of the domestic population and calls for few imported inputs. Such industries are generally labour rather than capital-intensive and are more competitively located in the rural areas where women are the majority of the population. Women have a comparative advantage that they can exploit in the development of agro-industries because it is they who have been the Region's food processors to date. Small-scale agro-industrial enterprise work is more compatible with domestic work and family responsibilities and more flexible in its schedules than large scale industries.

12. However, even in this area, women will require massive support and training if they are not to see their traditional work displaced by increasing mechanization. Their present micro enterprises can not compete even with small scale industrial enterprises. Women must take the initiative to prepare themselves to survive amidst increasing competition. They will, in the first instance, need access to credit, one of the major areas where they have been disadvantaged. They will have to gain technical expertise; they will need to seek out apprenticeship opportunities in enterprises which can give them the necessary know how. They must come to recognize the need for collective association with other women and other workers to remove some of the constraints that presently limit their economic efforts. Women's organizations can support them by assisting women in establishing small businesses, by encouraging governmental awareness of the need to give assistance to women-owned and managed small-scale enterprises, by assisting them in gaining technical know how and providing them with full information on how they can gain access to credit.